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THE NEW YORK TIMES,

Aide of Dr. King Promises Drive to Help Save Ra

By ROY REED

Special to The New York Times

PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 28—A follower of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. promised today to organize nonviolent street demonstrations, if necessary, to try to save the life of the white man accused of Dr. King's murder.

The Rev. James L. Bevel, a long-time associate of Dr. King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, called a news conference here today to announce the steps he would take in defense of James Earl Ray, a former convict who faces trial in the assassination last April 4.

Mr. Bevel visited Ray and his attorney last week in Memphis and tried unsuccessfully to enter the case as Ray's codefender. Judge W. Preston Battle ruled that he could not represent Ray because he had no lawyer's license.

Mr. Bevel said he would try to get a license and would appeal Judge Battle's ruling to a higher court. Failing there, he said, "I will seek justice in the streets by organizing a movement to that end."

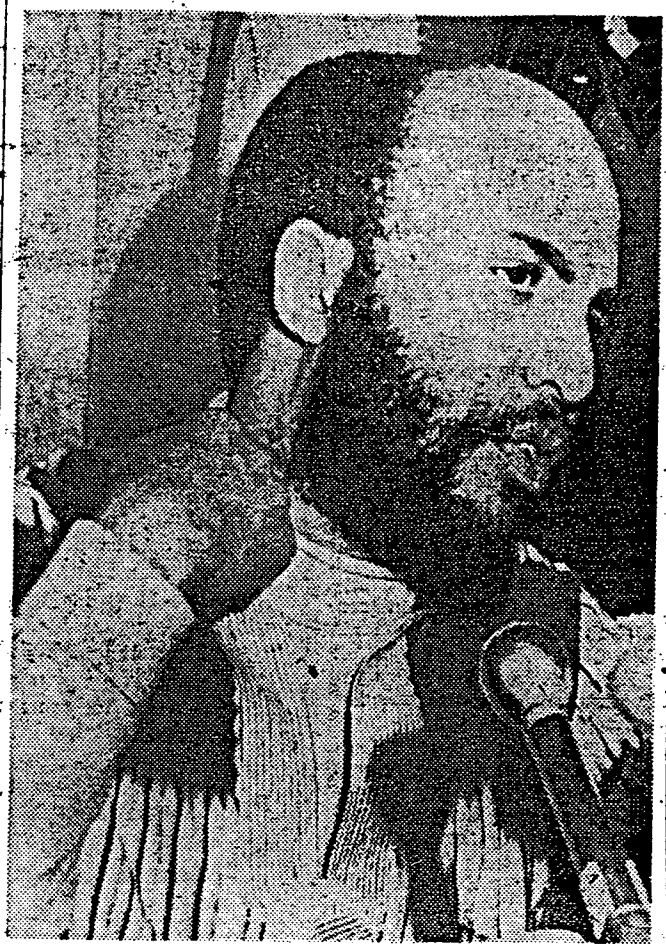
In Atlanta, the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, reversed an earlier statement and said he didi not believe Mr. Bevel had evidence of Ray's innocence. He said he was embarrassed by his aide's statemnts.

"James Bevel does not have the power or the authority to speak for the S.C.L.C. or its board of directors," Mr. Abernathy told reporters. "Mr. Bevel is the head of a department within the conference, the department of nonviolent direct action."

In Philadelphia, Mr. Bevel told reporters, "I am calling on the people of America to not let their bitterness and hate so blind them that they permit the State of Tennessee, or any other state, to murder an innocent man."

Asks a 'Program of Life'

He asked rather for an investment of time and energy in a program of life — not [illegible]



Associated Press

The Rev. James L. Bevel at his news conference yesterday

death." He said he meant by this feeding and educating poor Negroes in America and halting the war in Vietnam.

Mr. Bevel continued to insist that he had evidence of Ray's innocence, but he firmly refused to divulge it. He said his evidence was "a combination of facts."

He added in a private interview later that he had no idea who the murderer was and was not especially interested in finding out.

"That's the state's job," he said. His interest is in saving an innocent man, he said.

Mr. Bevel was in Memphis at the time of the shooting. He said he had been standing in a [illegible] of the motel within [illegible] Dr. King, who was on [illegible]

He said he had recreated the circumstances of the murder from conversations with Negroes in the neighborhood and with other persons.

His one-hour visit with Ray last week in the Memphis jail, he said, persuaded him even more thoroughly that Ray was physically and mentally incapable of staging such an assassination.

Calls Ray a 'Fall Guy'

He said he believed that Ray had stumbled into the case accidentally and was being used as a "fall guy" by the conspirators who actually killed Dr. King.

"And Ray is such a bad character that it is hard for people to care about him," he said, referring to Ray's crimin. record.

He said he had found the Negroes of Memphis eager to "burn" someone for the crime and the whites, in their collective guilt, willing to convict Ray "just to get it over with." So, he said, Ray belongs to no one and has no defenders.

Mr. Bevel seems interested in turning the Ray trial into a vehicle for furthering Dr. King's cause of nonviolence, or at least in keeping it from becoming an affront to nonviolence through the taking of still another life.

It is not clear how important Ray's guilt or innocence is to Mr. Bevel, but he has given the impression to friends that preserving the nonviolent principle is most important.

During his years with Dr. King in the Southern civil rights movement, Mr. Bevel seemed less committed to the doctrine of nonviolence than any of the men at Dr. King's side.

Temper With a Sharp Tongue

He was high tempered and sharp tongued in those days, striding up and down the dirt streets exhorting whites to get right and Negroes to get strong.

He seemed always on the verge of striking back when the segregationist firebrands made their violent attacks. Reporters had the impression that only the constant restraining hand of Dr. King kept him in check.

He has changed. He no longer covers his baldish head with a brightly colored skullcap, he has grown a beard and he has traded his Alabama overalls for a dansiki.

But he has changed beyond that. His voice is softer and his eyes are gentler. He speaks with more patience. Instead of chasing away white friends, as many black militants have done in recent years, he still surrounds himself with white as well as black workers.

Above all, however, he appears to have been wounded deeply by the death of Dr. King. Friends report that he was distraught for a long period. The experience has apparently changed his thought and his personality.

A friend said of him today: "Jim has finally become nonviolent."